

# COVID-19 Public Health Guidance for Commercial Maritime Settings in Washington State

This document provides public health guidance for maritime settings on minimizing the frequency and severity of COVID-19 outbreaks to protect the health of workers and passengers while continuing operations. Because vessels are congregate settings, public health guidance for the general public is not always applicable; this document is intended to be used as a resource and reference document for commercial maritime settings.

**This document provides guidance for the following vessels entering or departing from Washington (WA) ports:**

1. Commercial seafood vessels
2. Cruise ships on an interstate or intrastate voyage with an itinerary anticipating an overnight stay on board or a 24 hour stay on board for either passengers or workers
3. Any other commercial vessels on an interstate or intrastate voyage with an itinerary anticipating an overnight stay on board or a 24 hour stay on board for either passengers or workers, such as research vessels and other ships that sail for multiple days at a time

**This document is not meant for:**

1. Non-commercial vessels
2. Vessels of any size conducting day trips (including ferries, tour boats)
3. Cruise ships that fall under the jurisdiction of CDC COVID-19 Program for Cruise Ships Operating in U.S. Waters, which should refer to the following CDC guidance: [Technical Instructions for Mitigation of COVID-19 Among Cruise Ship Crew | Quarantine | CDC](#)
4. Vessels arriving from a foreign port, which should refer to the following CDC guidance: [Interim Guidance for Ships on Managing Suspected or Confirmed Cases of Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\) | Quarantine | CDC](#)
5. Land-based seafood processing or aquaculture settings, which should refer to the following guidance: [COVID-19 Guidance for Non-Health Care Businesses and Organizations \(wa.gov\)](#) and [L&I Requirements and Guidance for Preventing COVID-19 \(wa.gov\)](#)

**General recommendations:**

The WA Department of Health (WA DOH) recommends the following practices to prevent outbreaks of COVID-19 on board vessels. These recommendations may evolve over time based

on community burdens and disease patterns; vessel operators should anticipate adjusting health and safety measures according to changing guidance and disease patterns.

1. Verify that workers and passengers are [up to date](#) on COVID-19 vaccinations, which means they have received all recommended COVID-19 vaccines based on their age, health status, and when they first got vaccinated. Maritime operators may decide to exclude workers and passengers from their vessels if they are not up to date on COVID-19 vaccines; see [What You Should Know About COVID-19 and the ADA, the Rehabilitation Act, and Other EEO Laws | U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission \(eEOC.gov\)](#) for more information about vaccination as a condition of employment.
2. Workers and passengers should test negative for COVID-19 prior to boarding a vessel. They should test negative within 48 hours prior to boarding if using a molecular test (NAAT), or they should test negative on embarkation day prior to boarding if using an antigen test.
  - a. Anyone with documented COVID-19 infection in the previous 90 days should test negative on embarkation day prior to boarding using an antigen test (acceptable documentation of a prior infection is a positive viral test result >10 days and <90 days prior to pre-embarkation testing).
3. Before boarding a vessel, screen workers and passengers for the following:
  - a. [Symptoms](#) of COVID-19
    - i. People with COVID-19 symptoms should not board the vessel unless they do one of the following:
      1. Provide evidence of an alternative named diagnosis, OR
      2. Complete embarkation day molecular (NAAT) testing and receive negative test results before boarding the vessel, OR
      3. Provide documentation of a recent COVID-19 infection (positive [viral test](#) result >10 days and <90 days prior to embarkation) to explain any symptoms lingering after they have completed their isolation.
    - b. Known close contact exposure to a person with COVID-19 within the 10 days before embarkation
      - i. Close contacts should not board the vessel if they are not [up to date](#) with COVID-19 vaccines and did not test positive for COVID-19 with a [viral test](#) in the past 90 days and recover.
      - ii. Vessel operators may decide to allow boarding of close contacts who are [up to date](#) on COVID-19 vaccines or who provide documentation that they tested positive for COVID-19 with a [viral test](#) in the past 90 days and recovered, so long as the close contact is asymptomatic.

- c. A positive COVID-19 viral test within the 10 days before embarkation – individuals who test positive for COVID-19 with a [viral test](#) within 10 days before embarkation should not board the vessel.
- 4. See [Mask/Face Covering Guidance During COVID-19 \(wa.gov\)](#) for guidance on when to wear masks. Advise people to wear (and, if possible, provide) the best-fitting and highest quality [mask](#) that is available and feasible to wear, ideally a respirator (N95, KN95, KF94) or surgical mask.
- 5. Instruct everyone on board the vessel to self-monitor for [symptoms of COVID-19](#) and other illnesses.
- 6. Vessel operators should be prepared to provide quarantine and isolation accommodations for workers and passengers if needed, whether shore-based or on a vessel.
- 7. Encourage basic common hygiene practices, such as hand washing and respiratory etiquette, including covering coughs and sneezes.
  - a. Ships should ensure availability of conveniently located dispensers of alcohol-based hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol, including in the mess area. Where sinks are available, ensure handwashing supplies (such as soap, disposable towels, and waste receptacle) are consistently available.
  - b. See [Cleaning and Disinfecting Guidance for Public Spaces](#) for more guidance.
- 8. In addition to using routine cleaning and disinfection strategies, ships should focus on cleaning and disinfecting common areas where workers may come into contact with infectious persons. See [Cleaning and Disinfecting Guidance for Public Spaces](#) for guidance on cleaning and disinfecting common areas.
  - a. Do not use misting, fogging, fumigation, or wide-area spraying to control the spread of COVID-19. These methods are not effective, do not clean contaminated surfaces, and are hazardous to human health.
- 9. Good ventilation and indoor air quality are important in reducing airborne exposure to respiratory pathogens, chemicals, and odors. See [Ventilation and Air Quality for Reducing Transmission of COVID-19 \(wa.gov\)](#) and [Ventilation in Buildings | CDC](#) for information and options related to ventilation. See the Washington State Department of Health [Creating Safer Air Movement for Cooling](#) guidance for information on using windows and fans for cooling.
- 10. Employers are encouraged to develop flexible, non-punitive sick leave policies so that workers are not incentivized to conceal symptoms.
- 11. Consider making COVID-19 therapeutics (e.g., oral antivirals) available for workers and passengers under the direction of ship medical personnel or a telehealth provider, as early treatment can reduce the risk of severe illness and hospitalization for people with COVID-19 who are at high risk of developing more serious illness. Visit the DOH webpage for more information for you and your health care provider on specific [COVID-19 therapeutics](#).

12. Vessel operators are recommended to include COVID-19 prevention and response sections in their onboard safety plans and workforce protection plans.
13. In addition to the basic recommendations listed above, enhanced protective measures should be considered when [community transmission](#) is at moderate to high levels or if a dangerous variant emerges or surges. When making this assessment, consider community transmission in areas that workers travel through, as well as community transmission where workers originate from when they are first arriving in WA for the season. Enhanced protective measures may include but need not be limited to:
  - a. Instructing workers, passengers, and anyone else boarding the vessel to wear well-fitting [masks](#) in indoor/common areas of the vessel
  - b. Implementing physical distancing where possible
  - c. Limiting capacity of shared dining facilities
  - d. Limiting shore excursions
  - e. Implementing embarkation day antigen testing for all workers and passengers if not already standard practice

#### **Sick people onboard a vessel**

1. Anyone who develops [symptoms](#) should be directed to isolate immediately, in a private cabin or isolation quarters if available. This is true regardless of vaccination status.
  - a. The sick person(s) should wear a [well-fitting mask](#) in areas outside their cabin (e.g., sick bay) and when interacting with medical personnel.
  - b. Test for COVID-19 using a [viral test](#).
    - i. Anyone who tests **positive** should be isolated for 10 days, regardless of vaccination status (in a private cabin with a private bathroom or in a cabin and bathroom restricted to a cohort of COVID-19 positive individuals, if feasible). Isolation guidance for higher risk congregate settings is different from that for the general public.
    - ii. If a symptomatic person tests **negative by an antigen test**, they should remain in isolation and repeat the test in 24 hours with a new specimen.
      1. If the second antigen test is negative, symptoms have improved, and they have had no fever for 24 hours without use of fever-reducing medication, they may leave isolation.
      2. If the second antigen test is negative but symptoms have not improved, the vessel medical provider should screen and/or test for other illnesses and follow appropriate infection control procedures.
    - iii. If a symptomatic person tests **negative by a molecular (NAAT) test**, they should remain in isolation until their symptoms have improved and they have had no fever for 24 hours without use of fever-reducing medication.

Clinically evaluate and/or test for other illnesses and follow appropriate infection control procedures.

2. A person who tests positive for COVID-19 or who has symptoms of COVID-19 but is not tested may leave isolation after:
  - a. 10 days have gone by since their symptom onset (or since their positive test specimen collection date if asymptomatic), AND
  - b. Their symptoms have improved, AND
  - c. They have not had a fever for 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medication.
3. People who are severely ill with COVID-19 and people with compromised immune systems might need to isolate longer; consult medical providers for guidance.
4. Anyone providing care, evaluation, or transportation to the isolated person must wear appropriate personal protective equipment: respirator, face shield, gown, and gloves.
5. Follow CDC's guidance for [cleaning and disinfecting after someone is sick](#).
6. Close contacts (both crew and passengers) of a person with COVID-19 should wear a mask for 10 days post-exposure in common areas of the ship and be tested for COVID-19 with a [viral test](#) 5 days post-exposure, regardless of vaccination status. Close contacts should quarantine for 10 days post-exposure if they are **not** [up to date](#) on COVID-19 vaccines and did not test positive for COVID-19 in the past 90 days and recover (documentation of a positive [viral test](#) >10 days and <90 days prior to exposure should be reviewed). Close contacts who are up to date on COVID-19 vaccinations do not need to quarantine **unless** they develop symptoms, at which point they should isolate, get tested immediately, and wear a well-fitting mask in accordance with the guidance above for symptomatic persons.
  - a. The definition of a close contact varies by the number of cases of COVID-19:
    - i. Single case of COVID-19 within a 14-day period: A close contact is someone who was within 6 feet of the person with COVID-19 for at least 15 cumulative minutes over a 24-hour period. Cabin-mates are automatically considered close contacts; evaluate whether other individuals in shared spaces (e.g., workspaces, dining area, social activities) meet the close contact definition. It may be appropriate to identify an entire group in a shared space as close contacts if you are uncertain about whether they meet the close contact definition.
    - ii. Outbreak of COVID-19 (defined as 2 or more cases of COVID-19 within 14 days): Everyone on the vessel is a close contact.
  - b. Anyone who tests positive or develops symptoms of COVID-19 should follow the isolation, testing, and masking guidance above for symptomatic persons.

### **Controlling outbreaks of COVID-19 on board a vessel**

Once an outbreak of COVID-19 has been identified, consider the following options to help control the spread of the outbreak:

1. Even if masking is not normally required on the vessel, operators should consider temporarily instituting masking in common areas of the vessel.
2. Consider implementing physical distancing and limiting capacity in shared indoor areas, especially areas where food or drinks are consumed, when feasible.
3. Consider implementing regular (e.g., every 3-5 days) screening testing for SARS-CoV-2 regardless of symptoms until no cases are identified for 10 days.
4. If an employer has questions about responding to an outbreak on a vessel, please email [nhcs-covid@doh.wa.gov](mailto:nhcs-covid@doh.wa.gov) or call the WA DOH Office of Communicable Disease Epidemiology Non-healthcare Congregate Settings Program at +1 206-418-5500. Business hours are Monday-Friday 8:00AM – 5:00PM. Calls or emails received after hours or on weekends or holidays will be returned next business day.

### **Reporting outbreaks of COVID-19 on board a vessel**

An outbreak is defined as 2 or more cases of COVID-19 within 14 days.

1. When there is an outbreak of COVID-19 on a vessel, the ship representative should first notify the US Coast Guard, followed by WA DOH, within 96 hours prior to arrival at a WA port using the WA DOH Maritime COVID-19 Notification [website](#). If an outbreak arises <96 hours prior to arrival at a WA port, notify WA DOH immediately.
2. When there is an outbreak of COVID-19 on a vessel that is moored, at anchorage, or at dry dock, the ship representative should first immediately notify the US Coast Guard, followed by WA DOH within 24 hours of identifying the outbreak using the WA DOH Maritime COVID-19 Notification [website](#).
3. If you are entering or departing from a Washington port, please report outbreaks of COVID-19 to all applicable entities (Table 1).
4. In addition to notifying the appropriate authorities, it is recommended that vessels notify people on board the ship that there is an outbreak.

Table 1. Maritime COVID-19 notifications for WA State ports by itinerary and vessel-type

	Maritime COVID-19 Notifications for Washington State Ports						
	Vessel Type	CDC Maritime Unit	CDC DGMQ Seattle	United States Coast Guard	Customs and Border Patrol	WA State Dept of Health	FDA Interstate Travel
	Vessels at sea or vessels moored, anchored or dry docked in shipyard						
Ships arriving in U.S. from a foreign port	<b>Large* cruise</b> ( $\geq 250$ persons on board)	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
	<b>Small* cruise</b> ( $< 250$ persons on board)	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
	<b>Cargo</b> (including container, tanker, bulk carriers, and offshore ships)	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
	<b>Research and other special purpose</b>	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Ships on Interstate or Intrastate voyages	<b>Cargo</b> (including container, tanker, bulk carriers, and offshore ships)	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
	<b>Large* cruise</b> ( $\geq 250$ persons on board)	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes**
	<b>Small* cruise</b> ( $< 250$ persons on board)	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes**
	<b>Commercial Seafood</b>	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
	<b>Research and other special purpose</b>	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
	<b>Marine construction</b> (e.g., dredging)	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
	<b>Towing</b> (all tugs including salvage)	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
*With an itinerary anticipating an overnight stay on board or a 24-hour stay on board for either passengers or crew							
**If itinerary includes more than one state							

### Special considerations for commercial maritime shore-based operations:

- During shore-based operations (e.g., when employees are working ashore), companies should follow [COVID-19 Guidance for Non-Health Care Businesses and Organizations \(wa.gov\)](#) and [L&I Requirements and Guidance for Preventing COVID-19 \(wa.gov\)](#).

### Special considerations for maritime critical infrastructure operations:

Commercial maritime critical infrastructure operations may consider the following options to prevent or mitigate impacts of COVID-19 outbreaks:

- Enhanced protective measures should be considered when [community transmission](#) is at moderate to high levels or if a dangerous variant emerges or surges. When making this assessment, consider community transmission in areas that workers travel through, as well as community transmission where workers originate from when they are first arriving in WA for the season. Enhanced protective measures may include:
  - Pre-embarkment quarantine period for workers before boarding the vessel
    - Recommended for workers in this setting who are not [up to date](#) with COVID-19 vaccines
    - Consider for all workers in this setting during times of high transmission

- b. Additional rounds of screening testing before embarkment
  - c. Screening testing of workers at regular intervals, regardless of symptoms or vaccination status
  - d. Have workers who are close contacts of a COVID-19 case quarantine or complete a working quarantine even if they are [up to date](#) on COVID-19 vaccines, depending on characteristics of the COVID-19 variant(s).
2. When there is an outbreak of COVID-19 on board a vessel which threatens the ability to maintain normal vessel operations, the following contingency measures may be used to enable continued operation of the vessel. Consult with your ship's medical advisor and/or public health before implementation. See Table 2 for possible contingency measures.



Table 2. COVID-19 contingency measures to continue operation of maritime critical infrastructure vessels

	Contingency Measure	Recommended steps when contingency measure is implemented:
<b>Modified Quarantine</b> (Option 1 is preferred to option 2, if feasible)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Shortened on-vessel quarantine of 5 or 7 days for close contact workers who are not <a href="#">up to date</a> on COVID-19 vaccines and did not test positive for COVID-19 by a <a href="#">viral test</a> in the past 90 days and recover</li> <li>2. "Working" 10-day quarantine of workers who are not <a href="#">up to date</a> on COVID-19 vaccines and did not test positive for COVID-19 by a viral test in the past 90 days and recover</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. All workers should wear well-fitting <a href="#">masks</a> outside their cabins through 10 days post-exposure. Workers should wear the most protective mask that is available to them.</li> <li>2. Test all workers with a <a href="#">viral test</a> when the case is identified, at day 5, and every 3-5 days thereafter through 10 days post-exposure as testing supplies allow. Consider testing all workers regularly until 10 days go by without any new cases being identified (as testing supplies allow).</li> <li>3. If possible, assign workers completing a modified quarantine to low-contact posts.</li> </ol>
<b>Modified Isolation</b>	Shortened on-vessel isolation of 5-7 days for workers who have symptoms or test positive for COVID-19 and who receive a negative COVID-19 antigen test on or after day 5	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. If possible, assign workers completing modified isolation to low-contact posts.</li> <li>2. The person(s) with COVID-19 should wear a well-fitting <a href="#">mask</a> outside their cabin through 10 days after their symptom onset date (or positive test specimen collection date if asymptomatic). They should wear the most protective mask that is available to them.</li> </ol>

## More COVID-19 Information and Resources

Stay up-to-date on the [current COVID-19 situation in Washington](#), [Governor Inslee's proclamations](#), [symptoms, how it spreads](#), and [how and when people should get tested](#). See our [Frequently Asked Questions](#) for more information.

A person's race/ethnicity or nationality does not, itself, put them at greater risk of COVID-19. However, data are revealing that communities of color are being disproportionately impacted by COVID-19. This is due to the effects of racism, and in particular, structural racism, that leaves some groups with fewer opportunities to protect themselves and their communities. [Stigma will not help to fight the illness](#). Share only accurate information to keep rumors and misinformation from spreading.

- [WA State Department of Health 2019 Novel Coronavirus Outbreak \(COVID-19\)](#)
- [WA State Coronavirus Response \(COVID-19\)](#)
- [Find Your Local Health Jurisdiction](#)
- [CDC Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#)
- [Stigma Reduction Resources](#)

**Have more questions?** Call our COVID-19 Information hotline: **1-800-525-0127**

Monday – 6 a.m. to 10 p.m., Tuesday – Sunday and [observed state holidays](#), 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. For interpretative services, **press #** when they answer and **say your language**. For questions about your own health, COVID-19 testing, or testing results, please contact a health care provider.

To request this document in another format, call 1-800-525-0127. Deaf or hard of hearing customers, please call 711 ([Washington Relay](#)) or email [civil.rights@doh.wa.gov](mailto:civil.rights@doh.wa.gov).